

# Commander's Warrior Challenge sets Soldiers up to compete



Photos by Phil Manson

Sgt. Charles Kasten, 189th Infantry Brigade, Fort Bragg, N.C., loads a magazine into his M-16 rifle as he prepares to compete in the First Army Commander's Warrior Challenge held May 5 through 9 at Camp Bullis, Texas.

**Phil Manson**  
First Army Public Affairs Office

Early morning May 6, more than 110 warriors representing 16 First Army training brigades converged on Camp Bullis, Texas, to compete in a marksmanship contest the likes of which few of them had ever seen.

The First Army Commander's Warrior Challenge wasn't about a quiet and controlled environment for the shooter as might be found in the Olympics. It was about combat marksmanship and that makes all the difference, according to Maj. David Harrington, commander, Task Force- Small Arms Readiness Group (TF-SARG), First Army.

"Match shooting is usually in a fairly controlled environment," Harrington explained. "Everything is slow and methodical; the heart rate is low and slow."

"In the Warrior Challenge, the Soldier is under stresses associated with combat; running, movement to contact, acquiring the target and putting a lethal shot on target – everything our Soldiers are doing right this moment in Iraq and Afghanistan is simulated during the Warrior Challenge."

The Warrior Challenge was created by Lt. Gen. Russel L. Honoré, commanding general, First Army, not only as a competition, but as a training tool.

"The Soldiers who are competing here are force multipliers," Harrington said. "We are developing that intuitive response they will take back to their brigades and installations and will teach the lessons learned here to the units deploying overseas."

Five days of grueling competition made up the Warrior Challenge. Competitors arrived May 5 to conditions that were spartan at best.

The Soldiers stayed in un-air-conditioned huts, ate meals in a standard dining facility, and for lunch, each team captain was given Meals-Ready-to-Eat (MREs) to dole out to their team. If they forgot the MREs,



**Soldiers and a match official run toward the 100-yard firing line.**

the team didn't eat.

"The Soldiers here are undergoing total weapons immersion," Harrington said. "They carry their weapon with them at all times except in the Post Exchange. The Soldiers become more accustomed to handling their rifles and they develop good safety practices they'll pass on in training."

In an effort to ensure fairness, competitors were issued standard, pre-zeroed M-16s so no one had an advantage by bringing their own match rifle. Before the competition begins, each Soldier had a chance to personally zero his or her weapon.

The competitors fired M-16s and 9 mm pistols in matches, but also participated in the first-ever Army Foreign Weapons Competition, using Romanian-made AK-47 "Kalashnikov" rifles.

"We believe the Soldier needs to be familiar with the most common weapon of our enemy as well as his own weapon," Harrington said. "The foreign-weapons match actually pits the AK-47 against the M-16."

"Special Operations Command lent us the AK-47s, which were brand new and fired very well. After a familiarization on the AK-47 from 100 yards, the Soldiers had to fire the M-16 and the AK-47 at man-sized targets from 200 yards. Not only does the Soldier get to know the enemy's weapon, but he learns how much better, and how much more accurate, the M-16 is to the AK-47."

"Almost without exception, a Soldier will fire a tighter shot group with the M-16 than with the AK-47," said Master Sgt. Charles Coffey, a member of the Army Marksmanship Unit based at Fort Benning, Ga. "A new AK-47 will fire a good group, but over time the rifle 'loosens up' and loses accuracy. The M-16 will fire a nice, tight group new and three years down the road."

The competition wasn't all running and shooting, though. Every competitor had to work in "The Pits," and that experience is as important as the competition itself, according to Chief Warrant Officer Bryan Wood, Company B, 6th Battalion, 52 Aviation Regiment, Fort McCoy, Wis.



Chief Warrant Officer Bryan Wood, right, B Co., 6th Battalion, 52nd Aviation Regiment, Fort McCoy, Wis., talks about the finer points of shot groupings with Sgt. 1st Class Carl Krause, 157th Infantry Brigade, Fort Jackson, S.C. Wood has been a match shooter since the 1960s and is a member of the President's One Hundred.

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